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[Traffic](#)
[Movies](#)
[Restaurants](#)
[Today's events](#)

**NEWS / HOME**

Local News: Sunday, December 21, 2003

**OPINION**

**SPORTS**

**ENTERTAINMENT**

**HEALTH**

**TRAVEL**

**NORTHWEST LIFE**

**PACIFIC NW  
MAGAZINE**

**COMICS / GAMES**

**PHOTOGRAPHY**

**NWCLASSIFIEDS**

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[WIRELESS](#)

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PAGE](#)

[HOME DELIVERY](#)

Home delivery

[HOW TO ADVERTISE](#)

**NWSOURCE**

## Gonzaga denies official status to abortion foes

By [Tan Vinh](#)

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If there were any place that would embrace her Christian, anti-abortion student club without hesitation, Ashley Horne figured it would be Gonzaga University, a 116-year-old Jesuit school in Spokane and one of the Northwest's leading Catholic institutions.

But to her surprise, Gonzaga's Student Bar Association (SBA) has refused to recognize her Pro-Life Law Caucus as a university-sponsored group, ruling that the club would discriminate because only Christians can hold leadership positions in the organization.

"We live in a strange age, indeed, when a Catholic, Jesuit university would deny a Christian pro-life group recognition because its religious nature is considered discriminatory," said Greg Lukianoff, spokesman for the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), a Philadelphia-based group that considers itself a watchdog for students' rights on college campuses.

The unusual debate started this fall when Horne and Katie Hauck, both second-year law students, formed a club to promote an anti-abortion agenda and assist a crisis-pregnancy center in Spokane.

To enhance the club's profile, the students requested affiliation with the Student Bar Association (SBA), which represents law-school students and sponsors clubs and other activities for them.

Official recognition would entitle the group to money from student fees and to be mentioned on the university's Web page and in the student handbook.

The Pro-Life Law Caucus has about 20 members.

While membership is open to all students, the group's bylaws stipulate that only Christians can become club officers — president, vice president, secretary or treasurer.

The SBA considered that discrimination against non-Christians and denied the request.

The issue is not the group's stance on abortion; it's about discrimination, said SBA President Albert Guadagno. Leadership positions, he said, should be open to all students.

About 45 percent of Gonzaga's 5,800 students are not Catholic, and campus spokesman Peter Tormey said the university administration agrees with the SBA ruling.

"Any club seeking funds must not discriminate. This club has that discriminatory clause," Tormey said.

Lukianoff, acting as an advocate for the club, said Gonzaga's nondiscrimination policy states that the school "reserves the right to take religious faith into consideration where it is deemed appropriate."

What sort of campus clubs are permitted and which students can belong to them is a widely debated issue nationwide, most recently at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, both public institutions.

FIRE recently fought Rutgers for attempting to revoke the group charter of a student Christian group over the same issue. The case was settled last spring, with the university allowing the group to continue to operate and allowing members to choose leaders based on their religious beliefs.

Lukianoff said the Gonzaga case is unusual because most similar student-rights debates are taking place at public universities.

"It's surprising that a religious school would not (recognize) a Christian group," agreed Horne, the club's co-founder.

Lukianoff wants Gonzaga's administration to intervene and grant the group official status, which would enable the club to use university facilities for meetings and allow the group to be called Gonzaga Pro-Life Law Caucus.

The group had to drop Gonzaga from its name after it was told it could not affiliate itself with the university.

Horne said the club is still operating and recently held a baby-supply drive for a crisis-pregnancy center that promotes alternatives to abortion, such as adoption.

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**Back to top**